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# **SPEECH**

DELIVERED BY

THE

**HON. ALBERT SÉVIGNY**

(Minister of Inland Revenue)

AT

**WESTMOUNT**

ON

**THURSDAY, NOV. 15th,**

**1917**

Sevigny, Albert

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**HON. M. ALBERT SEVIGNY**

(Minister of Inland Revenue)

**At WESTMOUNT, on Thursday, Nov. 15th, 1917**

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The Division of Westmount and St. Henri is certainly one of the most important and influential in Canada on account of its working, industrial and commercial population. It is indeed a great honour to me to have received this acknowledgment of confidence which you have shown me by the offer of the Union candidature; but before accepting it, I had to prove to you that I was a good Unionist by urging you to have your choice endorsed by the Prime Minister. This choice has received the endorsement of my Chief, and I thank him, as well as yourselves for this prized testimony of confidence.

To-day I start upon the Electoral Campaign, which will, undoubtedly, be fruitful of various incidents, but which, I hope, will be crowned by the success we are anticipating, because we have made up our minds to be active, vigilant and devoted, not solely in my own interests, but in the interests of the great cause which unites us to-day. I will be your standard-bearer and you may rest assured I shall not suffer it to be captured, because it would be dishonouring those who are fighting, suffering and dying for the same cause on French soil overseas.

It will be impossible for me to be always in this constituency, because I shall have to defend the ground I won in Dorchester last

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January and for the capture of which that same "boche" has just directed his "cannon." But whether I am with you or in other fields of labour you may rest assured I am working "somewhere" in order to prove to our brave soldiers, on the 17th December next, that Westmount-St. Henri and Dorchester are with them heart and soul in their glorious task.

Since the beginning of the war, and even before that time, when I voted in favour of the contribution of \$35,000,000, I have frequently proven that the mistakes of the past would not prevent me doing my whole duty, and this I will perform against all opposition till the end. If I have made mistakes—and all are susceptible to err—I wish to undo these, and to those who still persist in criticizing acts of mine in 1910 and 1911, I have indeed the right and privilege to say that we were then in peace and unconscious of the war which was about to so seriously threaten us and our dear Canada. Those who find fault with me now are a thousand times more guilty, as they are doing their dangerous work and receiving the applause of the enemies of France and Belgium, while our soldiers are shedding their blood and our women and orphans are weeping over the loss of dear friends and relatives.

### AN INFAMOUS PLOT.

For many months an infamous plot has been hatched in this province which has stirred the passions and prejudice of the French-Canadian population to a high pitch. Men of high standing have caused the influencing of unscrupulous agents, and orders were given to endeavour to muzzle those who are doing their sacred duty and desire above all to tell the people the country is in a great danger. It is difficult for any one to maintain his courage in the presence of such an unpatriotic organization, such as the one which is so nefariously fighting against me and which I am aware would not even hesitate to take my life if such action would serve its own purposes.

Despite the sufferings endured all along, and which are known to me alone, I have weathered the storm for a long time, feeling and knowing that our soldiers are suffering still more in the

dreaded trenches, and that their mothers, brothers, sisters and fiancées are still courageously bearing the anxieties and sorrows of war without murmuring. All these noble sacrifices that are made by the victims of the war are much greater than mine, and if it were possible for me to do something to lighten them, the reward would be sufficient to make me forget what the adherence to duty has cost me. I have nothing but contempt for those who are arousing the people of my province and leading them to disobey or resist the law, and thus exhibit to the Americans, the English and the French people that which is not really true, that my countrymen are poltroons and cowards. These self-constituted advisers of the people assume indeed a grave responsibility which I must continue to refuse to share. However, it would have been very easy for me to join with them and associate myself with the prejudices and passions of my fellow-citizens and to be considered by them, for some time at least, as a great patriot. I do not want such popularity which is so thoroughly opposed to the voice of my conscience. I do not want any such plaudits when I witness the heartrending agony of my brothers who are dying daily on the field of vindication and honour. Those who are preaching cowardice are lauded by some of the French-Canadians of this province, but those who are doing their duty are approved by some of the best French-Canadians of this country, and especially by the French-Canadian soldiers in the trenches and the soldiers of the Marne and of Verdun. If my voice could be heard I would say to my dear French-Canadian compatriots that selfish men, in order to satisfy their personal ambitions, and for nothing else, are trying by the most dishonest means to bring about dishonour to the French Canadian race; I would say to my compatriots not to listen to the Rouges and Nationalists of our province because they are preparing for us a page in the history of the great war which shall be a shame to our race forever.

#### APPEAL TO ALL MEN OF GOOD WILL.

I appeal to all men of good will, of religious and other professions, to the working and agricultural classes of my province, and I ask them to act immediately and endeavour to put an end to the nefarious work of the Rouge and Nationalist politicians who are seeking to isolate us, not only in Canada but everywhere,



in the eyes of people who are putting forth every effort in fighting against the German overwhelming monster.

To-day, I am the only French-Canadian in the Government of our country, my colleague, Colonel Blondin, being at the front, and I realize better than any other that my task is too heavy a burden. But if I am an obstacle in the readjustment of this abnormal state of our representation in the Government, I declare that I am ready to give my place to others and retire to private life. I could have refused to accept the Military Service Act, but I swear before God and men that it would have been contrary to the duty dictated to me by my conscience. After having obtained the true knowledge of the situation at the front, I could not, as a French-Canadian Minister, admit that we French-Canadians would be the first to refuse to tender the helping hand which we had unanimously promised to the end since the beginning of the war. When I agreed to support the compulsory service Act, I knew that the object of that law would be to organize our country in this crisis, not only from a military but also from an economical point of view, and that is the reason why the Military Service Act of 1917 states that the Exemption Tribunals must take into account the needs of agriculture, commerce and industry in Canada. I know very well it is painful to ask young men to leave their family and positions to join the Canadian army at the front, but as a public man I have a sacred duty to fulfil and, if I did refuse to perform it, it would be my country that I would desert and our national honour that I would sacrifice. Why should a French-Canadian be the first one to quit? I ask my opponents to answer this question otherwise than by insults and innuendoes. Who is the French-Canadian who at the beginning of the war objected to our participation? A single one—a Colonel—who undoubtedly reserved himself for the battle against prohibition at \$1,000 per skirmish, as it happened in Quebec a few weeks ago, when he grossly insulted those who are too respectable to be ever reached by his poisoned arrows. Apart from this lone, courageous and brilliant parlor officer, we have all been unanimous, and it was with great enthusiasm that we agreed to support England who had so gallantly joined her forces with those of France and Russia. It happened one day in 1916, we heard that that same rebellious officer had

donned the military uniform to play his part in the great conflict. Often, too, previously, he had endeavoured to obtain contracts or secure a position in the militia at a big salary. When he appeared in uniform in 1916, there was a sentiment of revolt among all those who have any self respect in this country, and he was made to understand that the Canadian army could not tolerate such a poltroon in its ranks.

In the House of Commons the French-Canadians have been unanimous in their vote for war credits requested by the Government. Once, I think, a member, who was never present because Médéric Martin had paid him for his services by appointing him to a position, as he could not earn his living through his practice, made the remark that our effort in the war was too great. This same member was very much worried because he was unable to obtain the position of Parliamentary Secretary he had sought. I have told you that he was absent practically all the time, but that did not prevent him from drawing his parliamentary indemnity of \$2,500 for the session. There are certainly privileged people, indeed!

In the month of January, 1916, the Prime Minister stated to the people of Canada that our effort would reach 500,000 men. A few days afterwards the session of 1916 began. Not a single member blamed the Government for the decision. No motion of want of confidence was presented and all the war credits were voted unanimously. Furthermore, the Parliament term had expired and it was found necessary to have an election not later than the autumn of 1916. What happened? All the members gave their consent to have the constitution amended in order to extend the term of Parliament for a year. Therefore, everyone since the month of August, 1914, has given his consent to our participation. Everyone has assented to the departure of our brave soldiers, and when they were parading our streets with their determined bearing, their courageous look and their manly faces, we told them they were our pride and we depended on them to sustain the honour of Canada. We told them they would always be considered as our sons and that we would take care of their parents, wives and children.

## BRAVE MEN WENT FROM EVERY PART OF CANADA.

These brave men went from every part of Canada, have crossed the seas, have lived in the camps, and when their turn came to go into the trenches they went without a moment's hesitation. What have they done at the front during the summer and fall and winter for the last three years? Have they ever yielded before the enemy? No. Have they said that they had done enough and that they wanted to come back? No. Have they been afraid to die side by side with the soldiers of France and England? No. They have given us for Canada's glory the brave deeds of St. Julien, Lange-marck, Neuvechappelle, St. Eloi, Courcellette, Givenchy, Festubert, Vimy, and they have acquired renown, bestowed by the Germans, who volunteered the testimony that among the Canadian soldiers there was no prisoners. These soldiers who have made Canada great are my brothers, and to those who tell me to-day that I am a traitor because I have voted in favour of military service, I answer that the traitors are those who are abandoning our boys in the trenches. To those who call me Judas, I answer that Judas betrayed Christ after having promised to be his faithful disciple against those who had come to fight the Saviour. The Judas of to-day is the man who has promised our soldiers to never abandon them as long as they have fight against barbarity, and who to-day is ready to let them die without going to their help, or who is preaching that we must not do anything more for the sake of the cause. We would have preferred to promote our participation in the war through the voluntary system, but we have seen that this system has failed, and, at the same time, we have heard the call for help which came to us from this land of France where for three years the armies of all the different European countries have converged to save France and the powers which are fighting with her against the common foe.

This cry did not come from the French nor from the English soldiers, but from those whom the people of Canada have sent abroad and pledged to support. What did that appeal from the trenches say? Those who can hear it without emotion have undoubtedly been rendered insensible by the length of this terrible tragedy which has disturbed the world for three years past.



Indeed, certain men, who were without doubt sincere at the beginning of the war, when they were saying Canada was directly interested in the conflict and that we should make every effort to support England and France, behave themselves to-day as if they had forgotten the tragical and terrible times in which we are now living, but the great majority of our people are living in dread and anxiety, the proof of which may be seen in the sorrows with which hearts are filled as the bad news comes to us from the battlefields.

### THE CRY FOR HELP FROM OUR SOLDIERS.

The cry for help from our soldiers has entered the soul of our people, and how could it have been otherwise? After heroic struggles, indescribable sufferings, our brothers are asking if we are proud of them and if we are going to give a little rest to those who have not yet fallen on the field of honour, or if they must continue the struggle unaided to the end without hope of being replaced, as the voluntary system has given its full results. If I am allowed to go to the towns and villages in my province to repeat this appeal which has come from the front; if I am to be allowed to speak instead of being threatened with murder, as the Liberal organization of Quebec did last Sunday at St. Anselme, you will see the people answering generously and nobly that the trenches, immortalized by the courage of our Canadians, must not be abandoned as long as there are Canadians able to take the places of their fellow-countrymen.

Instead of having passed a new Military Service Act we could have enforced the Militia Act adopted in 1906 by the Laurier Administration. This law of 1906 gives us the power to mobilize our troops and to send them outside of Canada. When it was adopted the then Minister of Justice stated that it gave the Canadian Government, if it were so inclined, the right to send troops to India. Why did not the Borden Government enforce this law of 1906? Simply because the said law states that the raising of recruits would be by ballot among men from eighteen to sixty years of age, whether married or unmarried, without taking into account agricultural, commercial or industrial needs. Canada's

effort has already been considerable and it would be dangerous to continue it without method. The new law authorizes the raising of one hundred thousand men and grants the privilege to any man called upon to serve, to place before a tribunal reasons which might justify his exemption from military service. The judges of these tribunals are men of high standing, who know the requirements of commerce, agriculture and the various industries in the places in which they live, and it is certain that they will remember the economical as well as the military point of view in the performance of their duties. It is certain that our country can still furnish a sufficient number of men to continue the great task which we have undertaken in connection with this war. Everyone knows that this will lead to great sacrifice, but, in the face of the terrible manace of the enemy, how can we evade the call of duty? Someone has said that we should now leave the United States furnish the men. Those who so express themselves are, for the most part, men who have done nothing, directly or indirectly, for the sacred cause. Such language would be more suitable coming from the Belgians and the French, who have sustained such tremendous losses since the war began; but they will never think of giving over to others the task which has meant such losses to them during the last three years.

Is not the cause of Belgium and France our cause? Are we not directly interested and threatened in this war? I would dare say that we are even menaced to a greater extent than they are, for the reason that the hatred of Germany is directed first toward the British Empire, and, next to the British Empire, the United States. If Germany should be victorious, where would we be? France, England and United States defeated, what would be our lot? The German people would undoubtedly be the masters of the world. If they would ask that Canada be given into their hands, what power on earth could prevent the realization of their dream? Would this country not be a good acquisition for Germany—a new, rich country like ours? Then what would become of our life? The liberty which we enjoy, and which certain individuals abuse, would disappear forever and it would mean for us the beginning of the German rule with its iron discipline and

inhumane traditions. For forty years Alsace-Lorraine has been under that régime, and for forty years they have turned their eyes towards France anticipating the dawn of the day of freedom.

Do you not think that Germany, if victorious, would be more than ever desirous of acquiring Canada and be in the neighbourhood of the United States, her enemy of to-day? Within a short time Germany would control everything in Canada and we would, without doubt, see a great immigration of Germans into Canada from the United States.

### WHAT WOULD WE THEN BECOME?

From a French-Canadian point of view, it would be the end of all we love and cherish and respect. Germany would crush us with her hatred for all that is French, and we would be forced to endure her unbearable domination. Undoubtedly our great patriots would often ask for a referendum. Who is the man in this country who would be willing to accept German domination? Perhaps a few hare-brained men who say they are French, but do not entertain one fair sentiment for poor, blood-stained France, which commands the admiration of the world in her determination to vanquish the barbarians; but our whole population, English and French, trembles at the mere thought that we could be vanquished, and if the fate of arms should be unfavourable to us, we would see those who behave themselves selfishly in order to satisfy mean personal interests, become as unhappy as ourselves. From whatever angle we may view the present crisis, we must conclude that a German victory would be disastrous for us Canadians as it would be for England and her allies.

It is very unfortunate that at present racial difficulties divide the two races of this country, but these internal divisions are not grave enough to prevent us from loving the flag which has protected the country for one hundred and fifty years. British power has been made manifest to the world more than ever during the last three years. England could have remained neutral in this war if she had thought of the advantages which she could have gained from a material point of view, but she would have dis-

honoured herself through history and would have degraded us forever. Her great and powerful voice has spoken to Germany to prevent the latter from executing her hypocritical intentions, and for three years she has not ceased to struggle on land or sea to prevent the German people from attaining their heinous object. Her efforts deserve our gratitude and admiration. Thanks to the valour of her sailors she has kept the seas of the world free and that has meant abundance for us in a commercial way. Without the British fleet we should have experienced the greatest distress in our history and we should have been the victims of the German fleet. It is always easy to ventilate grievances, but these are not serious enough to prevent us from revering our flag, and I hope the day will soon come when it will float once more over a united Canada where the British subjects of French and English origin will better understand each other and lead our country towards its glorious destiny. In spite of these grievances, I say to my compatriots that we must do our duty towards our country. It is not for those who treat us unjustly that we are fighting, but for our country in danger.

#### MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR THE MOMENT.

The most important thing for the moment is to prove that we understand our responsibility as well as our rights, and if we do our duty we shall be able to seek our rights with a greater chance of success. Let us not allow ourselves to lose the sympathies of the majority of this country, because we would lose at the same time the sympathies of the allied people and expose ourselves to serious trouble for the future. Those who are laughing at an isolation possibility are men who will be called upon to soon disappear, but our race shall live, and it is our duty to prepare for it a future which will entitle us to its gratitude. The world has never before known troubled times like these which now prevail. War has made millions of victims, has devastated rich and prosperous countries, and has brought on the world a reign of terror. For three years human genius has been spending itself on works of destruction and not a single voice can be heard to re-establish in the world the much desired peace.



It is our enemy that has brought this scourge upon the world, and it is impossible for the allied powers to yield before its tremendous ambitions. The cause of justice, of right, and of liberty, is on our side. In all the continental countries men unite to fight the common foe, and where men have placed their personal ambitions before their country, disastrous divisions have resulted. We know the sorrowful events of Russia and of Italy, and this should open our eyes. Let us not make Canada a victim of the same disorders if we wish to prevent irreparable misfortune.

England, France and the United States have their men of all political shades united to evade the danger which threatens them. It is in union that Canada will find salvation, and let us pray God that He will unite us before the common foe.

This union the Prime Minister offered Sir Wilfrid Laurier on the most generous conditions—that of a fifty-fifty basis in the distribution of portfolios. For my part, I should have given, with pleasure, my place to a French-Canadian Liberal. If Sir Wilfrid Laurier had accepted this union at the end of his life, he would have done more than during his whole previous career to bring about harmony between the two races of this country, and Canada would not be subject to-day to the sorrowful scene of a division.

Other men in public and in private life have put aside their political ties to contribute to the national salvation. The voice of their conscience has been stronger than the voice of their party, and their achievement deserves the admiration of the whole country. I am called upon to work with these men in order to help our sons and brothers in the trenches, and also the people of Canada. The task is heavy, especially for me, under the circumstances in which I am placed, but I rely upon the men of good will in my province, and more particularly upon you, to help give me the courage to do my duty to the end.

Let us work together unceasingly against the flow of prejudice, passion and insult, and let us often repeat, like our soldiers, "we are not downhearted."

There are in this division hundreds of women more or less cruelly affected. For three years they have suffered from the absence of loved ones, but have uttered no complaints. I respectfully bow to their courage and heroism. History will tell that the great part which women have played in this great and terrible trial through which we are now passing, has been a powerful contribution to victory.



